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THE NEW YORK

LATIN LEAFLET

Entered at the Post Office in Brooklyn as second-class matter, October 29, 1900

25 Issues

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VOL III

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK FEBRUARY 16, 1903

No 65

TRUSTEES OF THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND

ARTHUR S. SOMERS, Ex-Commissioner of Education
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LAST NOTICE

The Eighth Meeting of the Latin Club

The eighth regular meeting of the New York Latin Club is called for Saturday, February 28, at 12 M, in the Hotel Albert, corner of University Place and Eleventh street, New York. Professor E P Morris, of Yale University, will address the club on The Character of Cicero. All persons who are interested, whether teachers of Latin or not, are cordially invited to be present. The plan is to serve luncheon (50 cents a plate for everybody) at 12 M, promptly, so that there shall be no delay. The address will follow the luncheon, and adjournment will occur about 2 P M, *thus leaving the afternoon still unbroken for those who attend*. Please send a postal card at once to the Secretary, Mr A L Hodges, Hotel Albert, New York, if you intend to be present, so as to inform Mr Frenkel, the proprietor of the hotel, how many to expect. *Please attend to this at once.*

H F TOWLE, *President* A L HODGES, *Secretary*

Professor Morgan's Address Before The New York Latin Club

IN FOUR PARTS—PART IV

This whole matter of formal indirect discourse is disproportionately prevalent in Cæsar. I mean disproportionately as compared to its appearance in other writers. The result is that a disproportionate amount of space is given to it in our grammars and a disproportionate amount of time in our teaching. The poor boy struggles for weeks over its problems and when he has mastered them and gone on to other authors he finds very little opportunity to exercise in them the skill which he has got from the study of Cæsar. This consequence reminds me very much of another result which comes out of the stress which we are now laying upon what is called Reading at Sight. I realize that I am now about to step on very ticklish ground; and I want to begin by saying that I am speaking my own thoughts, not those of my colleagues, for I do not know what they think on this topic; and that you must not think that I represent them or Harvard College or anybody or anything but myself. What I want to suggest to your thoughts is this: Our boys spend a vast amount of pains in learning to read Xenophon at sight, and then, after they have got the power, they find that there is no more Greek like Xenophon upon which

they can exercise it. And to a less degree this is true of Latin. Power to read Cæsar at sight does not give a like power over any other author. Now understand me. I do not mean that we should abandon altogether the teaching of reading at sight. It does undoubtedly give a valuable kind of power over the language, but on the other hand I am by no means sure that it enables the student to carry on his studies of Greek and Latin, after he gets to college, with much greater ease than students prepared under the old regime; and it also seems to me that this long drill in a single author in Greek and a single author in Latin is not the way to encourage students to continue their studies of the classics in college. It opens up to them no vista whatever of the wide and noble fields of literature which are there to be found. The subject matter of Xenophon and Cæsar is too much of the same kind—and that of a very narrow kind, being distinctly military. It was not always thus in the school course. As late as the time when I myself was at school we were required to read Sallust as well as Cæsar for the elementary examination; and in Greek we had to read not only Xenophon, but selections from Plato and Herodotus and a bit from Thucydides as well. Of course in the schooldays of our fathers and grandfathers the authors read in schools covered even a wider field. They were not all writers of Attic Greek or of Classical Latin—but what of that? they were *great writers*—immortal names—and they showed boys that there was something else in the Classics besides marching by parasangs and making speeches in indirect discourse. And boys were attracted to go on to read more of Classical literature. Parts of Greek plays were read; they are read still in English schools; there are books of selections from Greek tragedies and comedies prepared for the English schoolboy. Ask old gentlemen what Greek and Latin books they remember with most pleasure, and ten to one they will answer "the books of selections from prose and verse". And how much pleasanter it must have been for the teacher to vary his reading with his pupils instead of trudging on year after year over the same road. And if pleasanter, how much better he must have taught!

"Oh", but you will say, "We are teaching what the colleges require!" I reply: that answer might have done once upon a time, but it will serve its purpose no longer. Look at the changes in the college admission requirements during the past twenty years. Many of them are in answer to the demands of secondary schools. In these days of organizations of teachers—of organizations such as yours, for instance—you may depend upon it that changes which you agree upon as good, and for which you can give strong reasons, are pretty sure to be adopted. I would not, then, have you love Cæsar less, or Xenophon less, but I would have you love Greek and Latin literature more, and I would have you make your

pupils love it a *great deal* more. To be sure this means more work for a time for some teachers who have not familiarized themselves sufficiently with the literature, but what of that? We are all workers, and there stretches before us the many weeks—some people think the *too* many weeks—of the summer vacation. I don't know how it is with you, but with me that is about the only period in the year when I have any time for new work or for the review of old—time to sit under a tree with a pipe and get introduced to an ancient author whom I have never met before; or time to feel about me once more the charm of the immortals whom I learned to know long ago. And we must take some of that time, or some other time, to consider the question why we teach the classics at all. The old answers to this question will no longer serve. We can no longer contend that the acquisition of two dead languages and a certain knowledge of the contents of works composed over 2,000 years ago, are the best preparation which all boys and girls can have for *all* the demands of life. But neither is *any* subject, no matter how modern, an adequate preparation for all the demands of life. Nobody could hold such a view of Physics or Psychology or Philosophy or Mathematics, and there is no longer any reason why it should be held of Classics. Two or three hundred years ago, this was not the case. Men *went to school* to the ancients as their best teachers in all matters, and the men of those days were not mistaken. When the Greek and Roman literatures were rediscovered after the Dark Ages and people began to read about the ancients, they found themselves inferior to those ancients in very many points of civilization and learning. They felt like children before their teachers; or rather, they had for the ancients a feeling of veneration which few children, I am afraid, have for their teachers to-day. They looked upon the ancients as endowed with the profoundest sort of learning, which had been handed down from one nation to another, from Egyptians to Greeks, from Greeks to Romans. They were dazzled by the great productions of Greece and Rome as compared with the barren centuries immediately preceding themselves. And it is wonderful how long this respectful attitude towards the ancients survived. It survived long after great world-changing inventions such as gunpowder or printing; long after epoch-making discoveries such as that of oxygen and of the circulation of the blood; and long after the composition of modern literatures. Shakspeare and Bacon came and went; Descartes and Leibnitz lived and died; a new world was discovered in America; and still people talked as if the ancients were in some mysterious way a higher order of beings, superior in every thing to moderns. This opinion prevailed until half way through the nineteenth century, but nobody would seek to defend it now.

I remember that Professor F D Allen¹ once said that in former times men approached the ancients *on their knees*. We no longer assume this attitude. We do not study Greek and Latin because we think that the ancients were blessed with a higher civilization than our own and we cannot pretend that this study affords more than a partial training for life. The overidealization of the ancients has perhaps done more real harm to the cause of classical studies than any other factor. You remember how the Athenians got tired of hearing Aristides called *the Just*, and voted for his ostracism. So it was that men wearied

of hearing that the ancients and their literature were infinitely superior to everything modern,—until at last it is asserted in some quarters that the classics have not even a *disciplinary* value in the education of young pupils. This notion is of course as mistaken as the other, and the people who put it forward are generally people who know little or nothing about the manner in which classical studies are pursued at the present time. The fact is, as I have said, that our attitude has wholly changed. Classical studies have in recent times shared in the great progress made in all studies. We now look upon the ancients as men like ourselves; they were human, therefore they often erred. We are not afraid to find fault with what is feeble or even really mistaken in ancient literature. Formerly, *all* ancient writers, not merely the greatest, were venerated; but we no longer think of applying the same standards of comparison to compositions of different periods or by different kinds of men or by the same man at different times in his life. While every scholar knows that almost all our forms of modern literature are based upon the Greek, and while it is universally admitted that in some literary forms the Greeks were gifted far beyond any modern people, yet on the other hand there are works in Greek which are merely trivial, or even contemptible. Again, take the matter of civilization; nobody should pretend that the Greek civilization was superior to ours in all respects. If we could take a train and travel to ancient Athens, I think that we should find ourselves on the whole pretty uncomfortable there. To be sure, many beautiful things, for surpassing what we see in modern cities, would be all about us; but on the other hand we should miss many appliances for physical comfort which we have gained through modern invention and which we have come to think of as among the necessities of life. And more than this, it can scarcely be doubted that the ancient Athenians were vastly our inferiors in private morality, in humanity, and in regard for law. But the comparison of civilizations of different nations and ages is an extremely dangerous thing, if we try to say that one is higher than the other. This is because civilization is not determinable mathematically. To one man civilization may mean *clean streets*, to another it may mean *sculpture*. We need to understand the man and his surroundings before we can postulate anything about his position in the scale of civilization.

It is in this spirit that at the present time scholars are more and more approaching the ancients and their literature. We come to them wishing to *understand* them rather than to lavish upon them fulsome praise or to blame them for the lack of attributes which they could not possibly possess. I am reminded here of another saying of Professor Allen's. He once remarked: "We think of the Greeks and Romans as ancients; but when they were alive, they thought themselves as modern as anybody." This is the true spirit which ought to actuate us; to try to understand the ancients as men of like clay with ourselves, and to recognize in their literature the outgrowth of influences, and to seek to learn what these influences were.

But we must not be content with this. If a teacher has not tried to show his pupils not merely the influence of Virgil's own times upon Virgil, but also Virgil's influence on the history of poetic literature that has followed, he has not done his duty to that

great author; he has left him as an isolated phenomenon. If a teacher has not tried to show his pupils that it is the influence of living thought that gives rise to what we call rules of syntax, not rules of syntax that govern the expression of living thought, he well deserves the opprobrious epithet of gerund-grinder. If you reflect over what I have said about syntactical points to-day, you will see that the former is the line from which I have approached them. Thus it may appear that perhaps after all there has been a certain unity in what I have termed my "rambling remarks". Possibly you may recognize in them a kind of plea for the liberal literary study of my "rambling remarks". Possibly you may recognize definition which I once heard: "Literary study; yes; that's where you all sit round and somebody reads the Greek out loud, and then you all say *fine!*" Not this at all—but that general literary study which must be based upon the understanding of three things: first, the influences of time and surroundings which led the author to write what he has written; secondly, what was the author's message to his contemporaries; thirdly, what ought to be his message to us. If we have no time for the study and teaching of these principles, let us consider whether we have not been devoting too much time to other things: to syntax, for instance, studied for the mere sake of syntax, studied, for example, for the sake of mere categories, a sort of pigeonholing, of which a great deal too much is done to-day in this land; or to reading at sight, for the sake of a facility which will lead to nothing but the passing of an examination; or to the marking of quantity, particularly of "hidden quantity", with which boys should seldom, if ever, be troubled. If we have been mistaken in these or in other ways, it is never too late to change our methods. For, depend upon it, the salvation of the study of the Classics is in nobody's hands but our own.

THE NEW YORK LATIN LEAFLET

DAVID H HOLMES, Managing Editor
EASTERN DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL, BROOKLYN

Published weekly during the school year by an Editorial Committee of classical teachers from the high schools in New York City.

All communications concerning *The Leaflet* should be addressed to *The Latin Leaflet*, Eastern District High School, Driggs Ave and So 3d St, Brooklyn. Subscriptions to *The Leaflet* should be sent to the same address. Communications requiring answers should contain return postage.

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